Indo-China relations

753. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether China backs India for Security Council seat;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the two countries preparing for their first ever strategic dialogue while a free trade agreement is worked out; and

(d) if so, the details about the dialogue?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) During his recent visit to India in October 2004, China's State Councillor Mr. Tang Jiaxuan noted that China supports a bigger role for India in the international community, including in the United Nations Security Council. The Chinese side has also conveyed that priority should be given to enhancing the representation of developing countries as part of the reform of the UN Security Council.

(c) and (d) Government has accepted a proposal from the Chinese side to hold Strategic Dialogue at the level of Foreign Secretary/Vice Foreign Minister. The first meeting will be held on a mutually convenient date.

The Joint Study Group set up by the two sides to examine the potential complementarities for bilateral trade and economic cooperation, is also exploring the feasibility of establishing Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement between India and China.

Prime Minister's Bangkok visit

754. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Prime Minister visited Bangkok recently to attend the BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation) first Summit meet;

(b) whether the Summit finalized the Free Trade Agreement;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether the meet was also attended by Foreign and Trade Ministers and officials; and

(e) if so, what understandings or agreements were reached there?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes. The Prime Minister attended the First Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit in Bangkok on 31 July, 2004.

(b) and (c) No such agreement was finalized at the First Summit. However, the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Free Trade Area was signed during the Sixth Ministerial Meeting in Phuket, Thailand in February, 2004 by Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Bangladesh joined the Agreement in June, 2004. The Framework Agreement provides a roadmap for Free Trade Area in goods, services, investment and other areas of general economic cooperation.

(d) The Summit was preceded by meetings of Senior Officials and Foreign Ministers on July 29 and 30, 2004 respectively.

(e) The BIMSTEC leaders signed the BIMSTEC Summit Declaration to promote cooperation, *inter alia*, in trade and investment, transport and communications, tourism, energy, human resources development, agriculture, fisheries, and science and technology.

Dispute Resolution Mechanism between SAARC Countries

755. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during the recent SAARC Foreign Ministers' meet, Pakistan had suggested the constitution of a Dispute Resolution Mechanism for settlement of mutual disputes amongst member countries;